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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002178

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SUBJECT: LEAFLET DROPS IN NORTH KOREA TO CONTINUE

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Park Sang-hak, President of Fight for Free North Korea, an NGO active in promoting democracy and human rights for North Korea, said he had sent 1.8 million anti-Kim Jong-il (KJI) leaflets by balloon into North Korea this year and would not heed ROKG calls to stop. The DPRK has threatened suspension of its cooperation on the Kaesong Industrial Complex and military action if the ROK does not halt the leaflet drops. The Ministry of Unification's Deputy Director General of the Humanitarian Cooperation Planning Division Kim Eui-do dismissed the idea that the ROKG was publicly calling for a halt while privately supporting Park, though some MOFAT officials have smiled at Park's work. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Park, a North Korean defector who until his defection in 1999 worked in the propaganda department in Pyongyang, said on November 4 that he has been sending leaflets into North Korea since 2004 and that so far this year he had sent 1.8 million. He sends the leaflets in batches of 100,000 by balloon from different locations along the DMZ and the surrounding seas, depending on the winds.

¶3. (C) The leaflets are thin white plastic bags, 9.75 x 7.75 inches in dimension, printed front and back with water-proof black ink. Recently, Park said, he had begun putting \$1 or 5 or 10 Chinese yuan bills inside approximately one in 200 of the leaflets. He thinks North Korean won would be more attractive, and is in the process of securing North Korean currency.

¶4. (C) The text of the leaflets condemns KJI for the suffering he has inflicted on the North Korean people, compares and contrasts the ROK's and DPRK's political and economic progress, and calls on North Koreans to rise up and overthrow KJI. There is also a family tree depicting KJI's wives, mistresses, and offspring, as well as information on KJI's birth in the Soviet Union. Park said he drafted the text of the leaflet based on discussions with fellow defectors. Besides trying to circumvent DPRK authorities' hold on information, Park is trying, with the personal information about KJI, to undermine the mythological idolization of KJI.

¶5. (C) Despite the fact he has been sending leaflets since 2004, Park said the DPRK has recently reacted harshly for two reasons. First, he started putting money in the leaflets, a move which he has heard from contacts with connections in North Korea made the leaflets very popular. Second, he revised the leaflets to include personal information about KJI. More than the condemnation of North Korea and the call for an uprising, the attack on the KJI myth infuriated DPRK officials, he said.

¶6. (C) Dr. Han S. Park, Director of the Center for the Study of Global Issues at the University of Georgia, debriefed poloffs on November 3 on his recent trip to Pyongyang, his fortieth odd trip in twenty years. Dr. Park said his DPRK interlocutors asked him to pass a message to the USG that it is important for the U.S. to persuade the ROK to stop the balloon drops of leaflets into North Korea. He said the DPRK military is highly agitated, making him afraid of the consequences if the balloon drops continue. The DPRK has publicly threatened military action and the suspension of activities at the Kaesong Industrial Complex if the ROK does not stop the leaflet drops.

¶7. (C) Park Sang-hak said that since the inauguration of the Lee Myung-bak (LMB) administration, the Ministry of Unification had asked him publicly and privately seventeen times to stop launching the balloons. Park said he had no intention of stopping and believed that privately the Blue House was happy for him to continue.

¶8. (C) The Ministry of Unification's Deputy Director General of the Humanitarian Cooperation Planning Division Kim Eui-do dismissed the idea that the LMB administration was privately supportive of Park's efforts. Kim said the MOU is actively trying to dissuade Park from sending leaflets, so far to no avail, as there are no laws or regulations preventing private citizens from sending leaflets to North Korea.

¶9. (C) Park, recently placed under round-the-clock police protection because of anonymous death threats, said the publicity generated by the DPRK's opposition to the leaflets had resulted in a flood of visitors to his website, many of whom made donations. The BBC is currently filming a documentary of his work which he expects to generate even greater publicity and support.

¶10. (C) Comment: Without much notice, the leaflet drops have become the most contentious issue in the North-South relations, generating vocal protests from the North and the only official inter-Korean contacts over the past several months. South Koreans are not quite sure why these drops are so bothersome for the North now. Their explanations range from the technical--the inclusion of dollar bills--to political, such as KJI's health to the worsening food situation. So far at least, neither the South Korean government nor the public seem perturbed. In any case, even if it wanted to, there is not much the ROKG can do, because there are no laws to prevent such activities. MOU may be sincerely trying to persuade Park to stop but some of our MOFAT interlocutors smile when they explain there is nothing the government can do.  
STEPHENS